DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 170 225 SO 011 681

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TITLE Planning: An Interface Between Traditional and Applied Geography.
PUB DATE [24 Apr 79]
NOTE 9p.; Paper presented at National Meetings of the Association of American Geographers (Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, April 24, 1979)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Career Opportunities; *City Planning; *Curriculum Development; Educational Innovation; Educational Problems; Experiential Learning; *Geography Instruction; Higher Education; Internship Programs; *Professional Occupations; *Regional Planning; Relevance (Education); Student Needs; Teacher Education

ABSTRACT

The development of curricula to train geography majors for eventual employment in planning agencies would solve problems of declining student enrollments, educational relevance, and career opportunities for graduates. Although traditional geography programs offer training in field methods, cartography, and physical and economic geography, students should also be introduced to topics such as the political realities of planning. Such a program has been initiated at Slippery Rock State College in Pennsylvania. In addition to strengthening its traditional program, the department added courses in rural and urban planning, and created workshops and internships with city, county, and regional planning agencies. Problems of faculty preparation in teaching planning courses were solved through reading, workshops, seminars, courses, and involvement with local planning efforts. The success of the program is reflected in the fact that over 80% of the department's recent graduates have obtained positions in planning or planning-related agencies. (KC)

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PLANNING: AN INTERFACE BETWEEN TRADITIONAL AND APPLIED GEOGRAPHY

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National Meetings of the Association of American Geographers

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Local, state and regional planning has long occupied a peripheral position with respect to American geography. Undergraduate geography majors were traditionally trained for careers in teaching. As John Fraser Hart observed, "most academic geographers assumed that all the better undergraduate majors would go on to graduate school and eventually become college teachers."[1] Students were exposed to academic research for which there was little obvious practical application. A brief review of the geographic literature during most of this century further suggests that planning was not considered a reputable part of "academic geography." The prevailing attitude of geography faculty was probably expressed by Fred Kniffen when he opined that, "geographers are not very practical."[2] Better undergraduates were steered into graduate geography programs and not-so-promising students often ended up in the planning profession.

One notable exception was the Geography Department at the University of Chicago, where there was a long tradition of academic involvement in real-world planning. Harold Mayer relates his experience in the late 1930's while a graduate student at Chicago. "...I asked Charles C. Colby for his advice on securing an academic post. He said, 'you should wait about ten years; meanwhile you could have an interesting career in city planning.'"[3] This type of advice has certainly been rare.

Even when academic geographers moved into public agencies in substantial numbers, notably during the Great Depression and World War II, they often retained a disdain for their nonacademic colleagues. When Walter Kollmorgen worked for various government agencies, for example, he was always conscious of the distinction between himself and most of the others. Kollmorgen felt that they had allowed their desires for security and tenure to make them intellectual captives to their agencies.[4]

Over the years many geography graduates have become successful planners. Perhaps twenty percent of the professional planners in America today were either majors or minors in geography.[5] To what extent do they owe their success as planners to the training that they received in geography? Certainly it was important for them to work with source materials in many different fields, to integrate information, to draw conclusions, and to present results in a clear and concise manner. Traditional coursework in geography has no doubt been helpful in developing these skills. Also, traditional courses in field methods, cartography, aerial photo interpretation, and systematic topics such as physical geography and economic geography should have been valuable. Courses in quantitative analysis or remote sensing also may have been useful to planners.

Nevertheless, we believe that the traditional geographic training that planners received left many ill prepared for entry into the planning profession. Most had never been exposed in their college education to such important topics as the political realities of planning, the role of human values in plan development, the problems of obtaining effective citizen participation, the basic principles of design, the legal and bureaucratic framework for planning, or even the mechanics of various forms of land use control. Nor did most of our traditional graduates have opportunities while they were students to experience the career that they later chose.

Today academic geographers face new realities that demand the reappraisal of our traditional curricula and our traditional attitudes about the proper relationship between geography and planning. Throughout the country one can detect a very clear preference for courses that deal with subjects that are perceived to be of "relevance" by students. They know that there are few opportunities to teach geography today. Therefore, students seek those

courses which they perceive as helpful in gaining employment after graduation. Because of these recent national trends, our discipline is expe-riencing declining class enrollments, shrinking numbers of majors, and even the potential demise of geography departments at a few institutions. The present problem is made more ominous by predictions of a steady decline in the available pool of college-age people over the next several decades. We believe that if geography departments continue to offer only traditional courses and programs, our discipline will experience far greater losses in numbers, interest, and public support in the near future. We may even see a significant increase in the loss of geography departments at many institutions. The development of curricula to train geography majors for eventual employment in planning agencies seems to be at least one rational and appropriate response to these new realities.

Eight years ago our college offered only traditional regional and systematic courses. We had but twenty-three majors and maintained a low profile both on campus and in the community. There were no courses in planning and none of our faculty had been specifically trained in planning. However, we did have a faculty that was young, flexible, and willing to innovate. Most important, our faculty made the commitment to develop and implement a planning program in the department.

Several traditional courses lent themselves well to inclusion in the program that was developed (Overhead One). We required our planning majors to take traditional courses in economic geography, urban geography, physical geography, and conservation. Geography of rural areas and courses on field methods were added to strengthen our core of traditional courses. Then we added courses in rural and urban planning, preservation planning, and urban and regional systems. Workshops were developed on community comprehensive

planning and site planning and design. Naturally, all the relevant courses for a planning program could not be offered in the geography department, but we were able to utilize courses in other departments to enrich our program. Planning majors are urged to take Aerial Photo Interpretation from the Geology Department, Open Space Planning from Parks and Recreation, Introduction to Public Administration from Political Science, and Group Communications from the Communications Department. This gives us a multi-disciplinary curriculum in which traditional geography forms the principal focus while new geography courses provide direction and meaning in an applied sense.

Planning internships for our majors have been arranged with a variety of city, county, and regional planning agencies. Academic credit for an internship varies from three to twelve semester hours, depending upon the amount of time spent working in the agency. Interns are usually treated as professionals by their host agencies, and are assigned tasks that enable them to gain first-hand practical knowledge of both the technical aspects and political realities of planning. All interns receive periodic on-site visits from college faculty. They keep a daily journal of their experiences, and write a paper at the end of their internship relating practical job experiences to their academic coursework.

The impact of the new planning program on our department has been dramatic. The number of undergraduate majors has increased to over seventy-five, with most enrolled in the department's planning program. Demand for certain courses and department emphases have changed significantly (Overhead Two). Regional courses are now offered less frequently, and a host of new subjects (mostly developed for the planning program) are taught by the faculty.

Recent graduates from our planning program have done well in the job market. Better than eighty percent of our graduates have obtained positions in planning or planning-related agencies. A recent departmental survey indicates that our former students are now employed and engaged in such diverse tasks as designing a bikeway system for a small city, administering subdivision regulations for a rural county, developing an energy plan for a multi-county region, updating a comprehensive plan for a small township, working on relocation plans for a city redevelopment authority, and a host of other varied activities. The successes of our graduates have been encouraging.

Based on our college's experience, we believe that traditional geography departments elsewhere are well suited for developing and implementing their own planning programs. A potential shortcoming may appear to be lack of faculty expertise and background in planning. However, this can be overcome where faculty interest and motivation are present. Through reading, workshops, seminars, courses, and involvement with local planning efforts, existing faculty can gain the necessary background to structure sound courses in planning. They can also gain a good feeling for substantive elements of the planning process.

All the necessary resources are probably in place. With a little imagination, hard work, and commitment, planning programs can be successfully instituted in most traditional geography departments. They will not only benefit the departments where they are housed, but also the entire college, local communities, and our profession. We can improve the stature of our discipline and breathe new life into faltering geography programs. This can be done in such a way that geography does not become solely committed to planning, but retains the basic academic emphases and flexibility

that have traditionally been our discipline's greatest assets. Traditional geography, far from being obsolete, provides a natural core around which to build viable planning programs.

FOOTNOTES

[1]John C. Hudson (ed.), "Seventy-Five Years of American Geography," Annals, Vol. 69 (March, 1979), p. 110.

[2]Ibid., p. 63.

[3]Ibid., p. 114.

[4]Ibid., pp. 88-9.

[5]Paul F. Mattingly, "On the Value of Geography in Planning Practice," The Professional Geographer, Vol. 26 (August, 1974), p. 310.

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